

NEWS from

The Savannah River Site



Media Contact: Angeline Fitzgerald
(803) 952-8671

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SRS ACHIEVES MILESTONE IN WASTE REMOVAL

AIKEN, S.C. (April 14, 2003) – The Savannah River Site has achieved another major milestone in the removal of nuclear waste from the state of South Carolina. Today, the site released its 100th shipment of transuranic waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, New Mexico.

In recent months, the site has dramatically accelerated the rate at which this waste is shipped to WIPP, reaching the 100th shipment approximately six years ahead of its originally scheduled date. At this rate, the site will complete shipping these wastes to New Mexico approximately 20 years ahead of schedule. WIPP is a government-owned geologic repository specifically constructed for the safe permanent disposal of transuranic waste.

Transuranic waste, referred to as “TRU waste,” consists of clothing, tools, rags, residues, debris and other items contaminated with small quantities of radioactive elements heavier than uranium – hence the term “transuranic.” SRS TRU waste primarily includes items with trace amounts of plutonium. Approximately 11,000 cubic meters of TRU waste is stored at SRS.

Since May 2001, the TRU waste program at SRS has been approved to ship waste from the site to WIPP. Originally, the site was making shipments at a rate of about one per month. In the last few months of 2002, the site accelerated the shipments, releasing the 50th shipment at the end of the December 2002. Currently, the site is making approximately 16 shipments per month.

Westinghouse Savannah River Company President Bob Pedde noted that achieving this milestone less than two years from the program’s inception was only possible because of the excellent teamwork among the WSRC team, the U.S. Department of Energy and WIPP. “We have set some very high goals for speeding up the cleanup of the Savannah River Site, goals that require us to make great progress over the next few years,” Pedde said. “The teamwork and dedication that this team demonstrated in achieving this milestone shows me that the people of SRS are up to the challenge.”

(more)

WASTE SHIPMENT MILESTONE

APRIL 14, 2003

2/2

By the end of 2003, the site expects to surpass the number of shipments that were originally scheduled through 2014. Overall, the accelerated schedule will mean all the currently stored TRU waste at SRS is planned to be transported and disposed at WIPP by 2014 instead of 2034.

BNFL Savannah River President Sam Kelly and DOE-Savannah River Assistant Manager for Environment, Science and Technology Alice Doswell were both on hand to see the 100th shipment off. “When we made our first shipment two years ago, I predicted that the employees of the Savannah River Site would find ways to step up the pace,” Kelly said. “The challenge was – as it always is – to find ways to do the job better, and this team continues to meet that challenge. I don’t think anyone would have imagined that we could go from one shipment a month to 16.”

“Sending TRU waste to a safe, permanent disposal is an important part of the Savannah River Site’s environmental stewardship mission,” Doswell said. “Preparing the 100th shipment and reducing the original shipping schedules by 20 years demonstrates the exceptional corporate commitment by the Department of Energy and our contractors to accelerating environmental cleanup at the Savannah River Site.”

Before waste can be shipped to WIPP, it must be extensively characterized, to be certain that it is suitable for disposal at the facility. In order to meet the ambitious shipping schedule adopted in 2002, SRS teamed with the National TRU Waste Program to host the first deployment of a mobile characterization capability. Three mobile characterization systems were transferred to SRS, making it possible to perform the necessary tests on the accelerated number of drums.

The WSRC Team operates and manages SRS for DOE. BNFL Savannah River Corp., a partnering company with the WSRC Team, is responsible for the site’s Solid Waste Program, which includes the TRU waste program.

WSRC-03-14